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## Capitalizing on Public Discourse in Bolivia – Evo Morales and Twenty-first Century Capitalism

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### Abstract

The 2005 election of Evo Morales as the president of Bolivia marked a moment of celebration for the social movements who backed the rise to power of the Movimiento al Socialismo party (MAS – Movement for Socialism), with Morales as its leader. Morales adopted discourses derived from popularly supported *Buen Vivir*, alternatives to development, social and solidarity economies, and other forms of localized political and economic autonomy, creating a politics of possibility around such proposals. However, despite initial commitments and actions taken by Morales to improve well-being without replicating historically unsustainable and destructive pathways to industrial development, Bolivia continues to be characterized by fiscal dependence and macroeconomic prioritization of growth-centric policies sustained by extractive activities. In addition, the country is now rife with socio-environmental conflict. This paper will explore Morales' neglect of longer-term political goals for economic independence, self-sufficiency, and sustainability by considering competing theories of social movements, political parties, and the state that provide different lenses for understanding MAS' abandonment of its original political platform for change, Twenty-First Century Socialism (*Socialismo del Siglo XXI*). The paper reveals how the current scenario creates new barriers for the social movements that uphold proposals for sustainable futures, including deepened structural entrenchment in extractivism, the cooptation of alternatives to development proposals by government, the division of once-unified popular fronts, shifting electoral constituencies, and the emergence of new economic elites. Lessons from the Bolivian case are significant for guiding wider efforts at building sustainable alternatives to capitalist development.

## 1. Introduction

### Latin American Social Movements and Cycles of Struggle

The 2005 election of Evo Morales as the president of Bolivia marked a moment of celebration for the social movements who backed the rise of the Movimiento al Socialismo party (MAS – Movement for Socialism), with Morales as its leader. The emergence of MAS came at a time of increasing social organization and resistance across Latin America against the negative socioeconomic and environmental effects of nearly two decades of structural adjustment policies, neoliberal political reforms, and heavy-handed foreign involvement across public sectors (Reyes 2012). Throughout Latin America various “moments of rupture,” marked by increasing social uprising and protests beginning in the 1980s, resulted in the formation, rise to popularity, and election of “progressive” political parties in Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Peru. In addition, a number of regional integration institutions (ALBA, UNASUR, MERCOSUR, CELAC) were created to promote regional collaboration and the implementation of shared progressive agendas (Ibid.). While the histories, contexts, and dynamics of the social movement uprisings and election victories have their own particularities, their parallel and interrelated emergence reflects the existence of a broader “cycle of struggle” against the penetration of the continent by globally dominant socio-economic forces, including neoliberal development, globalization, and imperialism (Ibid.).

Despite the initial success of Latin American social movements to place populist, progressive, and anti-systemic candidates at the helm of states, and the subsequent improvements in economic and traditional development indicators in most of these countries, the more radical promises by many of these candidates have gone unmet. The increasing (albeit uneven) opening of these countries to transnational corporations and private capital, the expansion of extractive industries and mega-infrastructure, and continued entrenchment of illicit drug, arms, and mining activities reveal grave contradictions between political discourse and practice (Hollender 2015, Villegas 2013 and 2014). These activities have resulted in serious environmental, social, and economic consequences, as well as new impediments to achieving the sustainable pathways originally envisioned by the groups who supported these governments’ rise to power. In turn, these countries have seen a shift in the composition of political constituencies, including the rise of new opposition movements, which are

frequently met with repressive silencing tactics, and the backing of progressive governments by unlikely supporters that blur traditional left – right divisions. This paper will examine the phenomena of the abandoned political agendas of progressive Latin American countries by focusing on the experience of Bolivia under Evo Morales and the MAS party. It will examine a number of competing theories of social movements, political parties, and the state that provide different lenses for understanding MAS' abandonment of its original radical political platform for change, known as Twenty-First Century Socialism (*Socialismo del Siglo XXI*).

### The Rise to Power of Evo Morales and MAS

“...the election of Evo Morales did not bring about a revolution. It was a revolution that brought about the government of Evo Morales.”

(Forrest and Thomson 2007)

Morales's political legacy is rooted in the Coca Growers Federations of Cochabamba (Confederación Cocalero del Trópico de Cochabamba), where he grew in prominence as a leader, thanks to his charisma, indigenous descent, and revolutionary discourse. Out of this base, Morales attracted the backing of broad swaths of social movements, progressive intellectuals, academics, Leftists, and policy analysts within Bolivia, Latin America, and globally. Together with his supporters he constructed a political platform that promised improvements in material and non-material well-being without replicating the unsustainable and destructive pathways to industrialization taken by the North. MAS raised (and continues to raise) expectations that Bolivia could achieve universal and culturally-appropriate standards of well-being (according to the values and principles of *Buen Vivir*<sup>1</sup>) through inclusive and endogenous processes. The rhetoric vowed to simultaneously liberate the country from oppressive forces of capitalism and imperialism, while embarking on the pluriversal<sup>2</sup> construction of sustainable alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of *Buen Vivir* is “Good life.” It was originally made popular by Kichwa, Quechua, and Aymara populations in the Andes, but similar concepts can be found in diverse indigenous cosmovisions around the world, for example *Ubuntu* in south eastern Africa. *Buen Vivir* incorporates a plurality of concepts, allowing for an intersection of indigenous and occidental knowledge, focusing on human well-being, the “fullness of life,” the need to coexist with Nature, recognize its intrinsic value, and respect its physical limitations. *Buen Vivir* also focuses on the need to change the market's role, position, and mechanisms, and the way in which humans relate to each other economically. (Hollender 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Pluriversality is a radical democratic principle that encourages the coexistence of multiple ways of being. Under Morales and the new Bolivian Constitution, Bolivia was re-named the Plurinational

The success of Morales's first five-year term in office was marked by the passing of a new constitution that established the preliminary framework for the construction of a non-capitalist, plurinational state. The constitution included provisions to protect the Rights of the Mother Earth and for prioritizing *Buen Vivir* over economic indicators. Despite controversy surrounding its final approval, the legislation gained Morales international acclaim and a second resounding electoral victory in 2010. Another widely celebrated achievement of Morales's first term was the "nationalization"<sup>3</sup> of the oil and gas sector, a process which was followed by nationalizing portions of the telecommunications and electricity sectors in his second term. During this initial period, the MAS administration enjoyed the unified support of the country's six umbrella indigenous and peasant social movements, grouped together in the Unity Pact (Pacto de Unidad). Alongside the government, the Unity Pact bolstered their resistance against external forces of domination by demonstrating how the imposition of neoliberalism, capitalism, and imperialism resulted in negative consequences for Bolivia's people, environment, and economy. Simultaneously they engaged in participatory processes for rebuilding the country's institutional and legislative framework to enable the construction of sustainable alternatives, essential pieces for Bolivia's "Process of Change" (Proceso de Cambio).

However, over the course of Morales's second mandate (2010-2015), the coherence of MAS' anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist discourse began to unravel, as did the tightly woven social fabric of the Unity Pact. In addition to the Unity Pact disbanding into pro and anti-government factions, a number of the individual social movement members of the Pact have also split, a process which has weakened the ability of these groups to influence political outcomes, as will be examined later in the paper. A comprehensive description of the contradictory events, processes, and policy outcomes that began over the course of Morales's second term and continue into the present is beyond the scope of this paper. However, during this period (from around 2006-present), it became evident that MAS had abandoned both its radical political platform

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State of Bolivia (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia), acknowledging the countries' prioritization of the harmonious and mutually respectful co-existence of multiple indigenous and non-indigenous identities.

<sup>3</sup> Nationalization appears in quotes because of doubts that have been raised by analysts as to the validity of this term. Villegas (2013) reveals how the nationalization of oil, gas, and mining sectors across progressive Latin American countries was, in reality, a restructuring of contracts between host countries and private corporations that maintains preferential access for transnational corporations and reduces the possibilities for Bolivia to gain from the industrialization process.

and the movements that enabled its rise to power. This is revealed by three parallel and interwoven trends that will be described briefly in the following section: (1) The unbridled development of legislation and policies favorable to private, capitalist, and transnational interests, often through non-transparent and non-inclusive processes; (2) The rise of protest and opposition groups from within Morales's original bases of support, which has been met by the Bolivian government with repression (sometimes violent) and manipulative tactics to fragment, coopt, and punish social movements; (3) A shift in the composition of MAS's political constituents, including newly emerging entrepreneurial groups and members of traditional right-wing voters, such as industry and private interests.

### **Discourse vs Practice: Three Trends Reveal MAS's Abandonment of Political Promises**

#### ***Trend 1: Twenty-First Century Capitalism in Bolivia – Policy Examples***

The most blatant evidence of the abandonment by MAS of its promises to reduce Bolivia's dependence on foreign capital and reverse over 500 years of unsustainable of extractive development has been the expansion of predatory extractivism.<sup>4</sup> Although the Morales government originally opposed extractivism for being environmentally and socially destructive, unjust, economically unstable, and associated with the expansion of capitalist processes of accumulation, MAS' policy record reveals the contrary: Morales has opened national parks to fossil fuel exploration, exploitation, and pipelines, reversed the process of land reform to favor private interests and large landholders, inaugurated new mining, hydroelectric projects, and highways without and/or in spite of the lack of legally-required prior informed consent by local communities (Hollender 2015, Bjork-James 2013, Villegas 2013 and 2014, Webber 2012a and 2012b). The negative impacts of these projects are documented by local communities, with the support of organized civil society groups, in efforts to build opposition campaigns to the government's unsustainable activity.<sup>5</sup> Less

<sup>4</sup> Predatory extractivism refers to the expansion of extractive activities beyond hydrocarbons and minerals to agriculture, forestry, and fishing, and also to foreign control of arable land and water resources. It involves the use of increasingly risky technologies (such as fracking and deep-sea drilling), and reduced regard for ecosystem integrity and social rights (as extractive activities have expanded into protected areas and indigenous territories).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: <http://tipnisresiste.blogspot.com/>, <http://www.somossur.net/>, <http://www.territoriosenresistencia.org/>, <http://www.ftierra.org/>, <http://www.cedib.org/>,

documented, but equally obvious to the public eye in Bolivia is the proliferation of illicit drug cultivation, trafficking, and related money-laundering operations which has resulted in an unprecedented boom in Bolivia's real estate, construction, and auto import sectors. The explosion of illegal mining activities in Bolivia's remote and fragile natural areas are more widely documented (See CEDIB 2014).

An explosion in new legislation, natural resource concessions, contracts with transnational corporations, and growth in export volumes of primary materials<sup>6</sup> reflect the intensification of extractive fossil fuel, mining, and agroindustry activities. At the beginning of Morales's second term many of these legislative processes were hidden behind closed doors, unbeknownst to the participants of lengthy and inclusive drafting processes, often with Unity Pact involvement. These non-transparent and secretive legislative process provoked shock, discontent, and outcry as unrecognizable legislation was passed, sideswiping legitimate participatory processes. Currently, however, MAS makes fewer attempts to hide its plans. In 2014 Bolivia's Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of Economics and Public Finance confirmed MAS' plans to "take advantage of the possibility of growth through the exploitation of natural resources, with the state capturing the surplus and redistributing it to social programs and to other economic sectors that generate unemployment" (Webber 2014, Williams and Olivera 2015). Likewise, the country's vice president, Alvaro Garcia Linera, announced the expansion of Bolivia's "agricultural frontier" at a rate of one million hectares per year until 2025 (Bustillos 2015). It is expected that the country will officially legalize<sup>7</sup> genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the coming year, despite widespread public opposition (Ibid., Williams and Olivera 2015).

While Bolivia's export-oriented extractive development model has resulted in impressive economic growth, as reflected by

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<sup>6</sup> Mining growth increased from 170,000-450,000 metric tons from 2006-2012 and the value of mineral exports doubled to \$1.6 billion from 2008-2013. Natural gas exports also doubled to 64.54 million cubic meters/day from 2005-2014. (Zibichi 2014)

<sup>7</sup> GMOs are currently prohibited by the constitution, but make up 99% of Bolivia's 1 million acres of soy, and significant percentages of the country's sugar cane and wheat crops. In 2013 MAS legislators took a first step toward legalizing GMOs through the use of ambiguous and contradictory language in the 2013 Law of Agrarian Reform (Ley de la Reforma Agraria), which was passed in secret and without consideration of years of participatory work on the law's proposal by the Unity Pact and Bolivian campesino movements.

Bolivia's continuously increasing GDP<sup>8</sup> (until early 2014), social spending, and international reserves<sup>9</sup>, Bolivia's 2015 growth and budget projections reflect government plans to cut back in the face of plummeting mineral, gas, and oil prices.<sup>10</sup> Villegas questions the soundness of many economic decisions taken by the MAS government in order to attract private capital and foreign investment to Bolivia's extractive sector. For example, Bolivia's Mining Law, rewritten in 2014, includes a provision that allows transnational mining corporations to cease tax payments if mineral prices drop below certain thresholds. Due to the current (predicted) drop in global commodity prices, Bolivia is not receiving tax payments for minerals extracted by international companies aside from those removing zinc ores (Villegas 2013 and 2014). Another questionable response by Bolivia to the commodity crash has been to make up for lost revenue by increasing rates of mining and gas exploitation in conjunction with increasing the taxation of citizens, a perverse bailout by Bolivian taxpayers (Villegas 2014). Not only do these policies contradict MAS' policy discourse, they result in a further embedding of Bolivia in capitalist relationships of economic volatility and dependency on foreign capital, environmental destruction, and inequality, making it even more difficult for Bolivia to follow the alternative pathways to well-being that many social movement groups still uphold (Hollender 2015).

### ***Trend 2: Internal Outcry and Repression of Dissent***

MAS' contradictory policies have sparked costly internal economic and political problems. Many waves of anti-Morales protests, such as the TIPNIS highway controversy, have attracted global attention due to their magnitude.<sup>11</sup> Less visible are the near

<sup>8</sup> Since 2005 the economy has grown at an average of 5% annually, due to high international prices for primary materials and growth in export volumes. (Zibichi 2014, Villegas 2015)

<sup>9</sup> International reserves exploded from \$1.7 - \$14.43 billion from 2005-2013, representing 47% of GDP. (Zibichi 2014).

<sup>10</sup> The sustainability of basing social spending and redistribution programs on finite resources has been widely critiqued, as has the effectiveness of the programs (Hollender 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most visible of these is the conflict surrounding the highway project in the Isiboro-Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) in Bolivia. In 2008 the Bolivian government signed an agreement with Brazil to finance and build a 177km highway through the legal territory of three indigenous groups (64 communities). TIPNIS is also a national park with globally significant biodiversity. The Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) agreed to finance 80% of the highway construction leaving the remaining 20% to the Bolivian government. In a questionable bidding process, the Brazilian construction company Constructora OAS Ltda., was hired to carry out the project. The deal also included preferential access for Brazil to the phosphates that were to be extracted along with lithium from the Salar de Uyuni, another controversial project (Hollender & Shultz 2010). The TIPNIS highway project was approved without consulting local communities, and

daily instances of local communities defending their social and environmental rights from extractive projects and policies. The multiple forms of protest, including marches, roadblocks, occupying public spaces, hunger strikes, etc., reflect the discontent with MAS' failure to carry out the changes that their initial supporters expected (Bjork-James 2013).

Whereas MAS was once known as a “government of social movements,” Morales' second and third terms have been marked by oppressive and anti-democratic backlash tactics against the very movements that carried the party into power. Such tactics include: violent repression of indigenous protest against environmentally and socially destructive projects (such as the TIPNIS march); stigmatization of environmentalists, critics, and opposition members as “counterrevolutionary” or secretly allied with imperialist powers<sup>12</sup>; deliberate strategies to divide and weaken opposition movements; and nepotism exercised through political and material rewards for pro-government counter- mobilizations that “defend the process of change” in the face of protesters (Hollender 2015, Zibichi 2014). As a result, the Unity Pact has been completely dissolved and once-unified movements split into pro- and anti-government factions. The split initiated during the 65 day march to protest the TIPNIS highway project as a result of a series of (sometimes violent) confrontations that erupted between Unity Pact movements and members of CONAMAQ and CIDOB movements. The confrontations revealed the diverging opinions of movement members over whether to continue supporting MAS, despite the party's growing acceptance of activities including mega-projects and predatory extractivism. The more critical factions of both CONAMAQ and CIDOB, which eventually split off to form new, “organic” movements, are concerned that these activities necessitate forming relationships of dependency with transnational corporations and multi-lateral development banks, violating legal environmental and social safeguards, and increasing the extent to

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aroused fierce opposition, including a 65 day, 526 km protest march from TIPNIS to La Paz. The march met violent government repression resulting in 72-280 protesters injured. The highway project was temporarily suspended, but the conflict has yet to be resolved. (See Bjork-James 2013, Villegas 2013, and [www.territoriosenresistencia.org](http://www.territoriosenresistencia.org))

<sup>12</sup> The labeling by Evo Morales of Northern environmentalism as a new “predatory colonialism” at the UN “Rio+20” Conference and in other international forums has resulted in mixed messages to the international environmental community. See articles in Bloomberg (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-06-21/bolivia-s-morales-calls-environmentalism-predatory-colonialism.html>) and at ejolt (<http://www.ejolt.org/2013/10/full-belly-environmentalism-of-lead/>)



which Bolivia's economy is wedded to volatile global markets and neoliberal policy institutions.

While continued loyalty to MAS has afforded economic and political benefits to pro-government factions (see below), pact members who have been vocal in exposing MAS' betrayal accuse the government of engaging in physical violence, looting of headquarters, and corruption tactics in order to "manipulate, divide, and influence of the functional and representative bodies of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia" (Achtenberg 2014, Zibichi 2014). Aside from the physical, psychological, and economic impacts of MAS' tactics in the short-run, Bolivian social movements can no longer focus their efforts on building sustainable and culturally appropriate alternatives to global systems of domination, but instead must confront internal repression by their own government (Gutierrez 2012, Reyes 2012). Ironically, the success of Bolivian social movements to bring MAS to power has led to a deterioration of the conditions and possibilities for legitimate political participation upon which the success of the movements has been measured (Ibid.).

In addition to government repression of social movements, four highly-regarded Bolivian non-profit organizations<sup>13</sup> that conduct research and analysis on the economic, social, and environmental implications of extractive activities, natural resource concessions, land reform, agro-industry expansion, international investment relationships, etc. and have been accused by the government of "lying and political meddling" for criticizing the expanding extractive development model (Achtenberg 2015a).<sup>14</sup> The data collection, analysis, and documentation done by these NGOs is crucial for understanding the relationship of local environmental, social, and economic conditions to national and global policies and trends, with findings that have implications far beyond Bolivia's borders. There is concern that MAS's backlash on critical voices in civil society, including those of NGOs and social movements, threatens intellectual and academic knowledge-production, political organizing, and ultimately, democratic processes.

### ***Trend 3: Unlikely Solidarities- Indigenous Bourgeoisie and Traditional Elite***

<sup>13</sup> The four NGOs include the Center for the Study of Labor and Agrarian Development (CEDLA), the Bolivian Center for Documentation and Information (CEDIB), and the *Tierra* and *Milenio* Foundations.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to cracking down on Bolivian NGOs who are critical of MAS policies, the government expelled Danish NGO Ibis in 2013 for its involvement in supporting indigenous communities around their legal right to Free and Prior Informed Consent in their territories, and has mandated that all foreign and domestic NGOs undergo a registration process, including approval of their social contribution (Achtenberg 2015a).

Given the shifting loyalties of the MAS government away from its pro-indigenous political agenda to uphold local environmental and social priorities, it isn't surprising that the political constituencies in Bolivia have shifted. In overall terms MAS continues to be the favored party nationally, as evidenced by its 61% presidential victory in October 2014 and its retaining of the majority of legislative seats (majority in six out of nine departments), municipal mayor positions (66% popular vote across municipalities nationally), and departmental governorships (secure wins in 4 departments, leading in 2 contested elections) in sub-national elections in March 2015. However, upon closer look it is possible to see significant shifts in party loyalty away from previous supporters and towards non-traditional constituencies. For example, the breakdown of votes from the 2014 presidential election reveals significant losses in support from traditional stronghold Aymara and Quechua indigenous populations in La Paz, El Alto, and Cochabamba (Fidler 2015). In sub-national elections in 2015 MAS also lost key positions including governor of La Paz, mayor of El Alto, and mayor of Cochabamba (Ibid.). However, for the first time MAS won a majority of votes in the presidential election in Santa Cruz, which is the traditional seat of power of the agroindustry lobby and large land holding elite. This victory is thought to reflect the strategic alliance with the country's traditionally right-winged agricultural oligarchy, which is the primary beneficiary of the large-scale expansion of agro-industrial sectors, such as soy, timber, cattle ranging into the country's forested lowlands (Zibichi 2014). These election results reflect the abandonment of MAS by lowland indigenous communities as they witness the government hand over land concessions, once promised to grant permanent rights to ancestral territories, over to agribusiness and timber interests (Achtenber 2015b).

Outside of election results, the (coercive) reorganization of social movements and the rise of a new indigenous elite also reveal new unlikely government allies and foes. The tumultuous breakup of the Unity Pact has created rival offshoots of previously united social movements, divided according to pro vs antigovernment stance. In addition, the significant economic growth in the country has contributed to a rise of a new economic elite in Bolivia, who do not form part of the traditionally right-leaning elite. This group, often referred to as the "new indigenous bourgeoisie," is made up of agricultural producers and traders in Bolivia's low-lying areas and small mining cooperatives in the highlands<sup>15</sup> (Williams and Olivera

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<sup>15</sup> While highland mining cooperatives have been granted protection to mining concessions, practices, and market access in the face of state and private-sector mining companies, these

2015). The emerging bourgeoisie reflects a new entrepreneurial spirit embodying the values of *homo economicus*<sup>16</sup> and defying the revolutionary stereotype that has come to characterize members of Bolivia's popular classes. The Financial Times has drawn attention to the economic savvy of this group, who engage in "responsible" practices of savings, investment, fiscal austerity, and responsiveness to the market (Financial Times 2014). Also noteworthy is the crucial role that these new market-driven sectors play in facilitating alliances between the government and key sectors of international capital, thereby "opening the door to transnational corporations..." (Williams and Olivera 2015). MAS has capitalized on the "ethnic" support it receives from the new bourgeoisie, whose presence gives the appearance of continued indigenous backing on the surface, despite social movement upheaval.<sup>17</sup> Sociologist Sarela Paz confirms that MAS' composition has changed: "It's a reflection of the breakdown of the popular coalition and the rise of a new power structure whose epicenter is partnership and coordination between eastern agribusiness sectors, oil sectors, and emerging sectors using ethnic rooting as a device for political mobilization" (Zibichi 2014).

## 2. Theoretical Analysis

Despite the blatant contradictions that underlie Morales' radical political rhetoric, the MAS government continues to pay lip service to the original campaign platform. The remainder of this paper will explore different explanations for the abandonment by MAS of its political promises. It will draw from theories of social movements, political parties, and the state, but ultimately argue that

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cooperatives are notorious for engaging in exploitative labor practices, unregulated mineral refining processes, illegal acquisition of concessions from indigenous territories, tax fraud, and political corruption that have devastating effects on local communities and ecosystems and distort the economic context of the mining sector. (Villegas and Gandarillas 2014)

<sup>16</sup> A term referring to John Steward Mills (1874) conceptualization of the rational economic man, based on the argument that human behavior is grounded in pursuing self-interest and personal profit, denying the possibility of collective values, altruism, or reciprocity that are traditionally associated with Andean culture.

<sup>17</sup> The government continually uses a series of rhetorical and political tools to mask the implications of their betrayal of political promises. For example, the incorporation of indigenous concepts, styles of dress, rituals, and language into the governments' promotion and celebration of new extractive projects is a manipulative and contradictory tool of cooptation (Bjork-James 2013: 257). These tactics serve to minimize the importance of environmental criteria in decision-making and distract from the fact that now-declining social spending and budget booms are based on finite resources.

the interaction of these realms together, and with wider economic and political contexts, is required for understanding Bolivia's case.

### **Social movement theory**

“Any analysis of movement outcomes must examine the structure and strategies of the relevant exogenous political actors and institutions.”

(Andrews 2001, p73)

One possible frame for understanding the abandonment of political promises by Morales is to look at whether and how social movements contributed to this abandonment. Although social movements celebrated Morales' victory, they were unable to further effectuate their longer-term political goals for economic independence, self-sufficiency, sustainability, etc. This section will examine social movement theories that postulate how the structures, objectives, and strategies of social movements influence their ability to influence policy making and to resist forces of repression.

Social movements are considered important actors in agenda setting, and for their ability to influence the discourse, procedures, and behavior of states (Keck and Sicking 1999). As such, they contribute to the creation of “policy windows,” or the unique opportunities for policy proposals to be adopted by decision-makers, resulting in changes in the policy status quo (Baumgartner and Jones 2009, Keeler 1993). The introduction illustrated the extraordinary political circumstances in Latin America in the late 90's and early 2000's, which were marked by the electoral victories of progressive leaders in more than half the countries in the region. While it is impossible to pin down the exact factors that allowed for this unusual degree of policy change, it is certain that the region's social movements were instrumental. One hypothesis is that the cumulative efforts of national and regional social movements created a “moment of rupture” (or policy window) that allowed a new type of leadership and political agenda to take the policy stage (changing the policy status quo) (Reyes 2012). In Bolivia, breaking the status quo involved the election of the world's first indigenous president, followed shortly with the passing into legislation of the New Constitution, both exceptional examples of policy change.

Another possible explanation of this unique historical moment in Latin American history is Kingdon's (2003) Multiple Streams Theory, which attributes policy change to the coming together of problem, policy, and politics. Applied to Bolivia, the rise of distinct social movements who each proposed alternatives to neoliberalism (problem) occurred at a time when national and

regional political environments were favorable to the replacement of neoliberal regimes (politics) with progressive presidents (policy). With this socio-political confluence in place, unified social movements enabled the leadership that would later be responsible for policy formulation and implementation.

In addition to contributing to the conditions for policy change, social movements employ a number of organizational and tactical strategies that allow them to have an impact on policy. In Latin America the strategies of social movements cannot be understood in isolation, but must be seen as the result of accumulated learning from previous and parallel social and political struggles. In other words, the contiguous “cycles of revolt” that have marked the continent since colonial times cannot be taken separately from the current movement’s achievements (Reyes 2012). For example, it can be argued that characteristics of the communal and traditional structures of Bolivia’s indigenous communities, in continuous evolution since precolonial times, have been inherited by modern social movements (Mignolo 2010). In addition, the lessons afforded by Bolivia’s transition to democracy in the 1980’s has been important for preparing new social movement leaders (including Morales himself), as well as for creating a political dynamic responsive to movement-led change (Centellas 2015). Finally, Morrow and Torres (2007) argue that the strength of transnational civil society in Latin America, which encompasses a wider group of political actors and is itself a product of historical trajectories of struggle and change, provided support and contributed to the initial success of Bolivian movements.

Deliberately generating cumulative efforts and impacts is also an important strategy of social movements, as shown by Andrews (2001) in his examination of the Mississippi civil rights movement. Andrews defines successful social movements, not in terms of isolated legislative changes or electoral victories, but via their ability to present a sustained challenge to existing power relations. This discrepancy is important for evaluating the extent to which Bolivian social movements were “successful” beyond initial presidential and legislative victories. Andrews demonstrates how the Mississippi civil rights movement was able to impact policy implementation continuously and across levels by focusing on a combination of “infrastructure” (including organizational structure, resources, and leadership) and mechanisms of influence (including disruption, persuasion, and bargaining). His resulting “movement infrastructure model” can be applied to the six movements of the Unity Pact to evaluate their ability to achieve long-term viability and impact.

According to Andrews’ model, the strong initial infrastructure of the Unity Pact movements, each with their own

organizational structures, autonomous decision-making processes, and independent leadership, should have served to reduce threats to disarm or weaken them. However, this infrastructure changed after Morales' election when many social movement leaders were given roles within the MAS party. Also at this time, government resources were channeled to support the movements of the Unity Pact in the form of funding, office space, etc.

The newly blurred boundaries that resulted from MAS taking power may have contributed to the dissolution of the Unity Pact over time. Whereas the leadership of Evo Morales was originally strategic for the Unity Pact, the resulting recruitment of Pact leaders by MAS split their loyalty between movement and government, setting the stage for later instances of cooptation and corruption. Pact members who maintained independent funding streams from international actors or members of transnational civil society became targets of MAS' attack for having alleged ties to imperialist interests (Zibichi 2014). According to Andrew's theory, the relationships of dependency and related conflicts of interests of social movement leaders explains the inability of the Unity Pact to withstand divisive, cooptive, and corrupt tactics by the Bolivian government. The Pact's eventual disbanding prevented the movements from following up on implementation and compliance of the policy agenda and legislation that they'd fought so hard to achieve.

### **Theories of Political Parties**

“MAS is...the product of the accumulation of social forces around which today commands scant consensus and remains poorly defined with regard to its precise political and ideological whims.”  
(Harten 2014)

Although the means through which Bolivian social movements gained insertion into national policy-making was through the formation of a successful political party, MAS, the decline in coherence and impact of the Unity Pact is insufficient for explaining the behavior of Morales and MAS once elected to the presidency. Since it was ultimately the MAS party that failed to implement its promised agenda for change, it is necessary to investigate theories that examine the role of political parties and the state in policy change.

What is important here is to examine why MAS abandoned its political agenda once the party had control of the government. Burstein and Linton (2002) suggest that political parties with strong

ideological leanings (such as MAS) enter in a dilemma once they are elected to power. On one hand, parties are concerned with consolidating their power, either through reelection, expansion into legislative bodies, or through legislative backing. Depending on the wider political environment, this might require abandoning extreme political positions in order to garner votes across diverse publics. On the other hand, parties remain concerned with transforming ideological agendas into policies (Ibid.). It can be argued that during Morales' first term, the MAS party was able to address both electoral and ideological concerns in a complementary fashion. The landslide presidential victory in 2005 (53.72% of votes compared to 28.62% for the closest competitor) and overwhelming support and participation from Bolivia's indigenous and social movements gave Morales the endorsement he needed to move forward with bold legislative changes that simultaneously consolidated MAS' power and laid the foundation for progressive policy implementation, such as the strong social and environmental priorities that are reflected in the New Constitution. As a result, the new constitution<sup>18</sup> and nationalization measures were passed in Morales' first term despite staunch opposition from the eastern lowland "Media Luna" region.<sup>19</sup> Morales was never dependent on this region for electoral victory, yet he has favored policies that are attractive to Media Luna voters, for example measures to expand agroindustry. This demonstrates that it is insufficient to analyze MAS' behavior according to electoral concerns alone. The party's internal dynamics must also be evaluated.

A review by Centellas (2015) examines how, during its period of formation, MAS employed strategies to attract allies across political sectors, including social movements and traditional Bolivian parties, in order to improve its chances of winning the 2005 elections. However, after rising to power MAS began to exclude longtime supporters as well as latecomers who weren't formal party members, resulting in the alienation of some social movements and the disbanding of the Unity Pact (Ibid.). This strategy of party consolidation suggests that MAS had considerable agency in attracting and selecting from a wide pool of supporters, in contrast with narratives that attribute both MAS' existence and composition to Unity Pact social movements. These opposite accounts of the relationship between MAS and social movements up to and during

<sup>18</sup> The New Constitution effectively re-set Morales' presidential term count to zero, allowing for him to run for a third term in October 2014, a controversial move that followed the example set by Presidents Chavez and Correa after they instituted new constitutions in Venezuela and Ecuador.

<sup>19</sup> The ruling parties of Bolivia's eastern lowland "Media Luna" (Half Moon) region are traditionally associated with transnational capital and the landholding political elite. Their primary political concerns include maintaining rights to land, private property (including businesses), and natural resource royalties, essential to their economic and political power.

Morales' first term have important implications for understanding the shifting constituencies that occurred after his reelection in 2010. For example, if MAS was never a party of social movements, but merely cooperated with and adopted social movement discourse as an electoral strategy, its eventual betrayal of radical movements can be more easily understood.

It is impossible to determine whether Morales ever fully intended to pursue a radical political agenda or if wealth distribution and constitutional reform were also strategies to obtain electoral victory. However, even in his third term Morales continues to espouse the anti-systemic and anti-imperialist "Socialism of the Twenty-first Century" discourse that marked his rise to power. Regardless of MAS' true priorities, the party's policy legacy can be described as contradictory, patchy, or inconsistent at best. On one hand, Morales increasingly conforms to an economic growth agenda based on extractive activities and catering to the demands of transnational corporations/interests (?). On the other hand his high spending on social programs and public services (albeit financed by extractive revenues) reflect an adherence to populist redistribution. Beyond social movement and party politics, these contradictions demand a continued examination of wider contextual factors that constrain Bolivia's autonomy in policy making.

### **Theories of the State in Context**

"...the state is not...helpless against the onslaught of global economic forces but rather an area of contestation in which political (and ideological) rivals challenge each other within the constraints and opportunities afforded by ever-changing political and economic landscapes."  
(Centellas 2015, p231)

MAS' shifting agenda did not happen in a vacuum and cannot be understood by electoral politics and organizational dynamics alone. In order to analyze MAS' abandonment of political promises, these actions must be examined within a context of global systems that dictate a series of demands and constraints on state actors. A number of theories will be useful for understanding the role that dominant global paradigms have in influencing the behavior of the Bolivian government under MAS. Together these theories form the backbone of a longstanding debate about whether using the state as a vehicle for change is a viable strategy for radical actors.

Critical theory argues that the actions of states must be understood as a function of diverse and interdependent relationships



and contexts beyond state borders, and not limited to internal political and institutional arrangements and activities (Morrow and Torres 2007). In other words, no state can act in isolation from its wider context. Given that the state has real needs for resources and legitimacy in order to act, not all of which are bestowed internally, it must act in accordance with certain systems in order to obtain these capacities (Ibid.). Depending on each state's capacity and position, this might involve subscribing to the rules of multiple and overlapping systems of domination, such as neoliberalism, globalization, capitalism, development, and hegemonic politics. As a result, it is impossible to understand the rise of new political actors and policy agendas at the state level without considering the contextual factors that shape their motivation and behavior.

In the case of Bolivia, the government has justified its expansion of extractive activities and preferential treatment to foreign corporations as necessary for generating revenue for extensive social spending, a strategy that MAS claims does not preclude the construction of Twenty-First Century Socialism (Hollender 2015). However, it has not gone unnoticed that this strategy coincides with the long-term interests of transnational capital. Theories that examine how actions of the state are affected by and respond to dominant socioeconomic contexts might conclude that MAS' expansion of extractivism is evidence that the Bolivian state has been reconstituted to serve the mandate of global economic and political prerogatives (Drezner 2001, Reyes 2012, Gutierrez 2012). In other words, to the extent that Bolivia depends on the resources and legitimacy it obtains by participating in international capitalist relationships, as rulers of the state, MAS becomes at once a participant in and instrument of capitalist expansion, regardless of its ideological position.<sup>20</sup> This allows us to draw two conclusions about MAS' mixed bag of policies: first, Morales and MAS have had limited room to maneuver within Bolivia's entrapment in structures of dependent development, resulting in their catering to the interests of transnational capital (and inability to uphold the environmental and social safeguards that are upheld in the New Constitution); second, MAS retains a certain level of autonomy as

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<sup>20</sup> This echoes concerns from post-development theorists who argue that official development policies, as an extension of capitalist agendas, are in direct contradiction with environmental and social goals. Post-development theorists agree that (1) Development is grounded in a universal conceptualization of modernity and progress that mimics Northern models of industrialization, consumption, and economic growth, which (2) necessitates the use of top-down, coercive, forceful, or hegemonic implementation mechanisms and the elimination or cooptation of alternatives; (3) Development policy furthers the global embedding of capitalist systems, norms, and institutions that serve and protect the interests of powerful elites; (4) Development is in direct contradiction with its own stated environmental and social goals (Gudynas 2012, Escobar 2010, Esteva 2013, Lang *et al.* 2012, Pieterse 1996).

the government of a sovereign state, which allowed it to direct the resources generated by increased extractive activities during a commodity price boom to populist redistribution and social policies.

The mix of policies has had mixed results for Bolivia. For example, different groups have benefited from the high levels of social spending: first, Bolivian citizens benefited from the (albeit uneven) distribution of benefits (Reyes 2012, Hollender 2015); second, redistributive policies reinforced the popularity of the MAS government; and third, the market stability and economic growth generated by the programs were celebrated by neoliberal institutions who promote “the market” as the “organizing principle and objective of the state,” (Reyes 2012, p11). As a result, the spending policy has been labeled as “nationally redistributive neoliberalism,” referring to the fact that while Bolivia has the autonomy to designate revenue destinations, this can only occur “under the supervision of the market,” (as opposed to a socialist model of markets under state regulation) (Ibid.). This relationship of market dependence is further exemplified by the measures taken by MAS to attract transnational capital in the extractive industries at the expense of environmental sustainability, indigenous rights, and macroeconomic stability. Hence, despite the short-term gains afforded by social spending, the very possibilities afforded by Bolivia’s state leadership within a global market-driven system reveals the limited and relative nature of Morales’ authority.

### **Social Movements and the State**

“Taking power is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to change the world.”  
(Holloway 2005)

“Currently, emancipatory struggles occur in the midst of neoliberal capitalist relations and under a political order embodied by increasingly transnationalized nation-states.”  
(Gutierrez 2012, p57)

MAS has expanded extractivism and constructed a model of social spending that is highly subjected to volatile international markets, which has taken Bolivia further from conditions of well-being, economic independence, and alternatives to development, especially as commodity prices have plummeted (Hollender 2015). Whereas Marxist theory might attribute this situation to the capitalist cooptation of the political party, decolonial theorists argue that the situation is far more complex (and irremediable through state processes): “the social movements have lost their position of political protagonism due to the symbolic authority afforded to the

progressive governments while the progressive governments have in turn increasingly lost the social base necessary to produce substantive change within the state” (Reyes 2012, p13). This view questions whether the election of progressive leaders to the head of states should be celebrated as a victory, given that state leaders are necessarily embedded in institutions and processes that legitimize neoliberalism and capitalist globalization, the very systems which the movements elected MAS to oppose.

The result of the current scenario in Bolivia is doubly debilitating for the social movements of the Unity Pact: first, the movements have been relegated from their position of influence as engaged subjects in participatory political processes to objects of government coercion and social assistance (at least until assistance runs out or becomes constrained by conservative fiscal policy due to the commodity bust); second, as a result of fragmentation and dissolution, social movements have lost the ability to effectively pressure MAS to respond to their demands (Reyes 2012, Gutierrez 2012). As repression tactics are extended from social movements to include foreign and domestic NGOs, the only voices advocating for environmental protection and sustainable alternatives to extractive development are silenced. These discouraging results require more closely examining the contradictions inherent in pursuing a strategy of radical anti-systemic change from within the structures of the state, an actor that necessarily operates within the logic of dominant systems. Despite Marxists’ convictions of the ability to change the world by taking state power, Reyes (2012) argues that this creates a “never-ending chain of hegemony and counterhegemony” (p14) in which the demands of social movements will always be reactions to the existing social order, an irreconcilable impasse for the construction of alternatives.<sup>21</sup>

From the perspective of Bolivian social movements, the initial election of Morales and achievements of MAS’ first term were seen as successes. For the social movement constituencies and new bourgeoisie that remain supportive of MAS these successes have continued into the second and third terms. However, from the lens of radical movements, taking state power may have been one tactic among many in a wider strategy of transformation and not an end in itself, and therefore not a measure of long-term success. Movement participant and anthropologist Raquel Gutierrez (2012)

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<sup>21</sup> This view is similar to that held by the Zapatistas who are explicit in their rejection of the state as a vehicle for transformational change. They argue that power is something that some have and others don’t, and therefore taking state power will always be a tool of control and domination, involving an impossible and inescapable cycle (Esteva 2014, Leon de Mattis 2011). Massimo de Angeles (2014) differentiates between “power-to” versus “power-over” as a key distinction that must be made in building strategies for confronting capitalism.

argues that the notion of success held by radical social movements isn't anchored in concrete end goals, but rather to an ideal of social emancipation. She defines this emancipatory ideal as "a growing and intermittent trajectory or itinerary that arises from the persistent state of subjection and powerlessness that we bear in order to collectively and directly intervene in the decisions about and implementation of issues that concern each and every person – what are usually called "public matters." (This contrasts with political emancipation, or the "persistence of the capacity to subvert the dominant order," by which Andrews (2002) measures success (Ibid. p58).) Similarly, Reyes (2012) argues that the idea of success for the radical movements only results from "the struggle for the creation of nondomination (a reordering made possible by the creation of as-yet-unknown places)" (p17). Both of these visions emphasize the importance of the gradual and evolving construction of alternatives to the dominant order, above and beyond the antagonistic resistance to repressive systems. This vision resonates with a growing group of global actors engaged in radical democratic processes of open-ended, pluriversal, and prefigurative politics in order to build alternatives to capitalism, a point that will be taken up in the conclusion (Hollender 2015b).

What is important to emphasize here, is that while taking the state has led to important achievements in Bolivian political and legislative history, it has revealed itself to be a questionable strategy for transformational change. If new social movement uprisings replicate the state-taking strategy they will face two risks: (1) repeating the cycle of radical political parties being dissolved by the tasks, obligations, and rational of the state, or (2) once again reducing radical subjects to a mere interest group within civil society with competing demands before the state (Reyes 2012). Despite the historical tendency of these processes to repeat by groups who challenge capitalism, theorists and movements alike continue to argue the possibility of inverting state structures so as to foster the construction of environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable alternatives by social movements (Ibid.)

This paper does not argue in favor of either side in the longstanding state vs. non-state debate, but agrees with a growing view that recognizes the value of both approaches to change. "Either can happen anywhere...the two aspects can be complementary or contradictory." (Midnight Notes Collective and Friends 2009, p13). This approach acknowledges both the inevitability and the value of the persistence of both state and non-state approaches to systemic transformation. Just as state-focused efforts are seen to be at risk for cooptation, they are also viewed as offering real possibilities for creating alternatives. Similarly, while

the anti-state focus may be admired for ideological force, such initiatives don't guarantee the widespread participation necessary for society-wide transformation. In addition, any attempt to be totalizing in strategy, regardless of whether it favors state or non-state approaches, threatens to be a limitation to all efforts to transform politics<sup>22</sup> in order to allow for the construction of alternatives, at least until the future becomes clearer.

### 3. Conclusion - Implications for Alternative Futures

The outcomes of MAS's rise to power have been disappointing for Bolivians and onlookers who hoped that Bolivia (and other Latin American countries undergoing similar processes) would become the site of lasting anti-capitalist experimentation for large-scale and long-term system change. The initial commitments by President Morales to improve well-being without replicating historically unsustainable and destructive pathways to industrial development created a politics of possibility around these proposals, as did notable redistributive economic policy measures, nationalized natural resources, constitutionalization of principles of sustainability (e.g. rights of Mother Earth, plurinationality, non-economic conceptions of quality of life such as *Buen Vivir*, etc.), spearheaded regional integration through ALBA, UNASUR, CELAC, etc., and upheld environmental justice agendas in international arenas (e.g. equal but differentiated responsibilities, prior informed consent, right to development, climate debt, etc.). However, notwithstanding these achievements, Bolivia continues to be characterized by fiscal dependence and macroeconomic prioritization of growth-centric policies sustained by natural resource extraction. The immediate economic, social, and environmental consequences have led to extensive socio-environmental debates.

While the current Bolivian policy environment continues taking the country further away from alternative possibilities, the cumulative nature of social movement learning and cycles of resistance do not preclude the possibility of future transformation. Reyes (2012) argues that despite the failures at state and policy levels, social movements and indigenous groups continue to work at local levels to create spaces and processes where groups can link local alternative practices and ideas to jointly build new futures. He believes that a new cycle of revolt will emerge in Latin America,

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<sup>22</sup> In another working paper I argue for "Commoning the political," or the sharing of the political process between all actors who aspire for non-capitalist futures. Such a process requires continuous evolution and reinvention until post-capitalist future(s) has(ve) been reached and involves ongoing, bottom-up collaboration and cooperation of diverse groups in open-ended, pluriversal, and prefigurative processes towards loosely defined, dynamic end goals (Hollender 2015b).

building upon the lessons of the past, as evidenced by the continuous bubbling of outcry and discontent against the contradictions of current progressive governments. However, Reyes fails to point to the exact locations and groups that he believes can rise from the still smoldering ashes. Where he sees a continent rife with potential, others argue that the worst has yet to come, pointing to the drop in commodities prices and the systematic attacking and undermining of any remaining alternatives or opposition, especially those with foreign support (Villegas 2013 and 2014). This raises doubt as to how and where alternatives can gain a viable foothold.

Granted the precariousness of alternatives, there is a tendency by scholars to oversimplify or romanticize Bolivian social movements and the achievements MAS through claims that have not been backed by empirical evidence. Many scholars eagerly grasp the colorful discourse and personae of Evo Morales, magnifying his image as a champion of indigenous social movements and the Rights of Nature, while neglecting the underlying contradictions and failures of MAS. Such views frequently equate legislative victories with policy outcomes, despite warnings by scholars like Burstein and Linton (2002) that policies on paper are not always implemented or enacted into law. Also, Latin American social movements are frequently portrayed as a unified force that is linked to a global “movement of movements,” despite the internal divisions and conflicts. This misrepresentation is reinforced by studies who examine the influence of global “transnational advocacy networks” on states (Keck and Sikkink 1999), when in actuality the strategies, goals, and types of social movements look far beyond state-centric advocacy, as demonstrated by the growing presence of “autonomists, direct-actionists, post-anarchists, and post-marxists, as well as some indigenous, anarcha-feminist, and anti-colonial tendencies” (Reitan 2012).

In celebrating the progressive image of Evo Morales and the exotic otherness of Bolivian social movements without examining the conflict and contradictions below the surface, scholars perpetuate inaccurate perspectives and legitimize the gap between discourse and practice.

By overlooking the negative and contradictory policies and practices of the MAS administration, scholars contribute to these tendencies continuing with impunity. While celebrating and analyzing the implications and potential of the new constitution, “nationalization,” and high social spending is important, rigorous research and investigation is also needed to examine disconcerting tendencies in Bolivia’s social, political, and economic spheres. For example, allegations link the growth of real estate, commercial, and finance sectors, even as oil prices plummet, to the rise in illegal coca

production, narco-trafficking, and corruption. Such research would be useful for exposing the structural barriers to change, both in Bolivia and beyond.

The Bolivian social movements that maintain committed to the construction of non-capitalist alternatives are confronting oppressive systems at multiple scales, beginning with their own government. The ongoing protests against the abandonment by MAS of campaign promises signals that a new cycle of struggle may be on the rise, one that encompasses a growing variety of social movement and non-movement actors within and outside of Bolivia. The lessons from the last cycle of Bolivian and Latin American struggles will continue to inform the cumulative learning of this new cycle within Latin America. These lessons are important globally, as local populations increasingly identify and speak out against problems of inequality, injustice, and environmental destruction due to wider political, social, and economic systems (Hollender 2015). It is my hope that the perspectives provided in this paper about socio-political dynamics surrounding Bolivia's MAS will serve as strategic tools for citizen groups, networks, and movements around the world that remain engaged in legitimate struggles for building alternatives.

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